A SERMON

Preach'd before the

KING

Feb. 24. $167\frac{4}{5}$.

BY

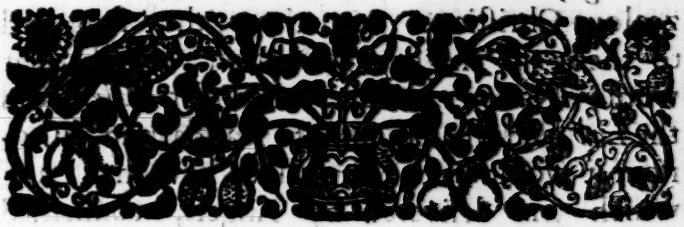
ED. STILLINGFLEET D.D.
Chaplain in Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

Printed by His Majesties special Command.

LONDON,
Printed by *Rob. White*, for *Hen. Mortlock* at the *Phœnix* in S^t. *Paul's* Church-yard, and at the White Hart in *Westminster* Hall.
1675.

A

Tr. R. A18 PAM S857W



HEB. iii. 13.

——Left any of you be hardned through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.

WHen the *Jewiſh Chriſtians* had formed themſelves into an eſtabliſhed *Church*, and were became conſiderable for their number as well as for their zeal and devotion, their obſtinate Brethren thought it high time for their own ſecurity, at leaſt to weaken and divide them, if they could not wholly ſuppreſs and deſtroy them. For this end, they made uſe of different inſtruments and means, according to the different ſeaſons, and diſpoſitions of them. Sometimes, when they had any encouragement, or connivence from the Roman Power, they ſet upon them with rage and fury, *ſpoiling their goods*, and threatning their lives: But this hard uſage did only heighten the

Heb. 10. 32, 34.

courage, and unite the affections of the more zealous Christians. Sometimes, they suggested to them the mighty veneration, which their whole Nation alwayes had for *Moses* and the *Law*, and what an infinite scandal and dishonour it would be to them all, to have that Law, which was delivered by Angels, confirmed by Miracles, established by Prophets, admired by the Gentiles, and had continued among them for so many Ages, now of a sudden to be laid aside for the sake of a new institution, that expressed no more regard to them than to any other Nation in the World. And so great was the love which the *Jews* had to their own Countrey and Religion, such an opinion was generally received among them of the peculiar favour of God towards them, that they who could not be shocked by persecution, were in danger of being overcome by flattery. From hence the *Author* of this *Epistle* make it his business to shew the excellency of *Christ* above *Moses*, and of his *institution* above that of the *Law*, in respect of the *Priesthood* and *Sacrifices*, and *the benefits* which come by them; and that although this *new and living way* were but lately discovered, yet it was that which was alwayes designed by God, foreseen by the Patriarchs, foretold by the Prophets, and longed for by good men as *the Consolation of Israel*: and it could be no more disparagement to *Moses* and

the

the *Prophets* to yield to the *Glories* of the Kingdom of the *Meſſias*, than it is to the Stars not to be ſeen when the light of the Sun appears. But beſides theſe, there were ſome among them capable of being wrought upon by other kind of arguments, ſuch I mean, who out of a ſudden tranſport of zeal, and being convinced by the miraculous operations of the *Holy Ghoſt*, had declared themſelves *Chriſtians*, but yet retained a ſecret love to their ſins, and the pleaſures of this World: theſe were the Perſons whom the *Apoſtle*, not without reaſon, expreſſes the greateſt jealouſie of, as in danger of Apoſtaſie: and therefore in many places of this Epiſtle, he repreſents to them the dreadful conſequences of ſuch an Apoſtaſie, for it was no leſs than *crucifying the Son of God afreſh and putting him to an open ſhame*; *it was counting the blood of the Covenant wherewith they were ſanctified an unholy thing, and doing deſpight unto the ſpirit of Grace*; nay it was not only *crucifying*, but *treading under foot the Son of God*; and therefore he bids them conſider, what puniſhment ſuch perſons would deſerve *at the hands of God into which they muſt fall*, and what hopes there could be of pardon for thoſe who ſo openly rejected the only means of obtaining it; For *if they did* herein *ſin wilfully after they had received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more ſacrifice for ſin, but a certain fearful looking for*

Heb. 6. 6.

10. 29.

26. 27.

of

of judgement, and fiery indignation which shall devour the Adversaries. But he not only sets before them the sad effects of Apostasie, but as one that loved their souls, and designed to prevent their ruine, he gives them the best advice and counsel against it: He knew well enough, it was not the dissatisfaction of mens reason, which was the ground of their infidelity: but, as mens more open designs are governed by such springs which are least discovered; so, whatever these warping Christians might pretend, as to zeal for the Law, and their ancient Religion, the bottom of all was a principle of infidelity, not arising from want of sufficient reason to convince them, but from a close and secret love of sin which made them willing to quarrel with what ever was so repugnant to it, as the doctrine of Christ. To this end, he puts them in mind of the case of their *Fore-fathers* in the Wilderness, who wanted no arguments to convince them of Gods Goodness and Providence; yet nothing would satisfie them, but they were still murmuring and com-
Heb. 3. 11. plaining, till at last *God sware in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest.* "And since you "all acknowledge, they had reason enough to "be satisfied, but out of an obstinate and stub-"born humour *hardned their hearts in the day of* "*temptation in the Wilderness*; take heed *Brethren*,
12. "saith the Apostle, *lest there be in any of you such*

"*an*

"*an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living*
"*God*; and do not look upon this advice as vain
"and needleſs to you that are called the *believing*
"*Jews*, but you have cauſe to be very watchful
"over one another, eſpecially in this Tempt-
"ing Age, *exhorting one another daily while it is*
"*called to day, leſt any of you be hardned through the*
"*deceitfulneſs of ſin.* As though he had ſaid to
them, "You who now glory in the name of *Be-*
"*lievers*, and are hitherto as forward as any in
"the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, do not think
"your ſelves to be above the need of any helps
"to confirm your faith, and to arm you againſt
"the aſſaults of temptations, for your very ſe-
"curity may betray you; but conſider *the ſin*
"*that doth ſo eaſily beſet you* on every ſide, the
"various artifices it makes uſe of to deceive men,
"and when it hath once gotten admiſſion, how
"ſtrangely it bewitches and infatuates the
"minds of men, how unwilling they are to
"be convinced of their ſins, how much more
"unwilling to part with them, and how natu-
"rally the love of ſin brings men to infidelity,
"and then you will ſee how great reaſon there
"is, why you ſhould be *exhorting one another daily*
"*while it is called to day, leſt any of you be hardned*
"*through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.*

In which words, are theſe three things conſiderable.

1. The

1. The *danger* they are in of *being hardned through the deceitfulneſs of ſin*, who have the moſt powerful *motives* and *engagements* againſt it.

2. The *manner* whereby *ſin* doth prevail upon men to harden them, *through the Deceitfulneſs of ſin.*

3. The *care* that all Chriſtians ought to have to prevent *being hardned through the Deceitfulneſs of ſin: Leſt any of you*, &c.

1. The *Danger* men are in *of being hardned through the deceitfulneſs of ſin*, though they have the moſt powerful *Motives* and *Engagements* againſt it. For never any Perſons had greater arguments againſt returning to the practice of ſin, than theſe to whom this *Epiſtle* was written. They had embraced among the firſt principles
Heb. 6. 1,2. of the doctrine of Chriſt, *the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptiſms and of laying on of hands* (for the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghoſt) *and of the reſurrection of the dead and of eternal judgement.* And what can we ſuppoſe to have greater force and efficacy to reſtrain men from ſin, than what is contained in theſe fundamentals of Chriſtianity? But we ſhall find that no *Motives* have ever been great enough to reſtrain thoſe from ſin, who have ſecretly loved it, and only ſought pretences for the practice of it.

Such is the frame and condition of humane nature conſidered in it ſelf, ſo great are the advantages

advantages of reaſon and conſideration for the government of our actions, ſo much ſtronger are the natural motives to vertue than to vice, that they who look no farther, would expect to find the world much better than it is. For why ſhould we ſuppoſe the generality of mankind to betray ſo much folly, as to act unreaſonably and againſt the common intereſt of their own kind? as all thoſe do, that yield to the temptations of ſin: For if we ſet aſide the conſideration of a Divine Law, *to ſin* is nothing elſe but to act fooliſhly and inconſiderately. But on the other ſide, if men firſt look into the practice of the World, and there obſerve the ſtrange prevalency of Vice, and how willing men are to defend as well as to commit it; they would be apt to imagine that either there is no ſuch thing as Reaſon among men, or that it hath very little influence upon their actions; and that the talk of Vertue was firſt found out by ſome great enemy to the Felicity of Mankind. Such different apprehenſions would men have from the different wayes of beholding the Picture of Humane nature; either as it is in its own frame, or as it is to be ſeen in the World. They who have with the greateſt judgement and care ſearched into the nature and firſt principles of humane Societies, have all agreed that the chief end and deſign of men in joyning together was, for the

mutual benefit and advantage of each other; and that in order to this, certain Laws of *Justice*, *Equity*, *Mercy*, *Truth*, *Gratitude*, *Temperance*, as well as of *Subjection* to *Government*, ought to be inviolably observed by men. And since these things have the universal consent of mankind to be for their general good, how comes it to pass, that men being joyned in these Societies for such ends, make so little Conscience of the practice of them? How come so many to live, as it were, in open defiance to these Fundamental Laws of Nature? How come others, only to make use of the pretence of vertue to deceive, and of honesty and integrity to cover the deepest dissimulation? If they be not good, why are they pretended? If they are good, why are they not practised? So that whether we consider mankind in it self, or in Society; we find the *Motives* to vertue to be much more weighty, and considerable than those to sin; and yet that the practice of men is directly contrary.

But it may be said, *that all this might happen in the world for want of wit and education to polish and improve the natural Faculties of mens minds, and to direct and encourage the practice of vertue.* I wish the world had not so many instances that men of the greatest wit have not been men of the best Morals; but if wit, and education, and Philosophy had been the most effectual means to reclaim men

men from ſin, where ſhould we have looked more for the flouriſhing of vertue, than in *Greece* and *Rome*? And yet in thoſe times, when all the accompliſhments of *wit* were at the higheſt in thoſe places, the manners of men were ſunk into the greateſt filth of debauchery. It would make one aſtoniſhed to read the admirable diſcourſes of their *Philoſophers*, and to conſider the ſtrange height that *eloquence* and *wit* were arrived to among their *Orators* and *Poets*; and then to compare the account given of the manners of the *Gentile* World, not only by their own *Satyriſts*, but by the *Apoſtles* in their ſeveral *Epiſtles*: What a monſtrous *Catalogue* of ſins do we meet with in the *firſt Chapter* to the *Romans*? of ſins of ſo deep a dye, and of ſo horrid a nature, and ſuch an Inventory of all ſorts of Wickedneſs, that one might imagine the Apoſtle had been rather deſcribing ſome viſion of Hell than the ſeat of the Roman Empire. To the ſame purpoſe he ſpeaks of the *Corinthians* and *Epheſians*, who thought themſelves behind none of the *Greeks* of that Age in the breeding then moſt in Vogue; but we need not inſtance in particulars, when S. *Peter* calls it in general *the will of the Gentiles, to live in laſciviouſneſs, luſts, exceſs of wine, revellings and banquetings*, as well as *abominable Idolatries*; and S. *John* in ſhort ſaith, *the whole world lyeth in wickedneſs.*

Rom. 1.26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32.

1 Cor. 6. 10. Epheſ. 4. 17, 18.

1 Pet. 4. 3. 1 Joh. 5. 19.

It might be worth our while to consider how so universal a degeneracy of manners should happen in those ages, when men pretended more to Wit and Learning, than they had done in any time before. And for this, it were very unreasonable to assign any Cause that were equally common to all other Ages, such as the corruption of human nature; which, how great soever it be, is the same at all times; neither do I think it reasonable to lay it wholly on the bad examples of the teachers of vertue, knowing how malicious the worst of men are in endeavouring to make those who seem to be better, to be as bad as themselves: but there are some peculiar reasons for it, and I wish they had been only proper to those times: as,

1. Separating *Religion* and *Morality* from each other. When their *Religion* was placed in some solemn Rites, and pompous Ceremonies, and costly Sacrifices; but all the matters of *Morality* were confined to their *Schools*, there to be enquired after by those that had leisure and curiosity for them. As though God were more concerned for the colour, and age, and pomp of their Sacrifices, for the gestures and shews of their devotion; than for the purity of their hearts, the sincerity of their minds, or the holiness of their lives. When once the people had swallowed that pernicious principle, that Morality

lity was no part of their Religion, they had no great regard to the good or evil of their actions, as long as a little charge, and four looks, and going to their Temples at certain times were thought sufficient to expiate their sins. And they were much more encouraged in Wickedness, when the Gods they worshipped were represented on the stage as acting all manner of villanies: and no doubt, they thought it a great comfort to them in their debaucheries, that their Gods were as *good fellows* as themselves. And what could all the precepts of *Philosophers*, or sayings of *wise men* signifie to those who were so far from looking on vertue as any necessary part of their Religion, that they thought those fit to be worshipped for Gods, whom they never believed to have been good men?

2. When they had thus rendred vertue unnecessary, by making it no part of their Religion, the next thing was to make it appear *ridiculous*; which was a certain way to make *Fools* out of love with it; who do not consider, what is fit to be laughed at, but what is so. When *Socrates* at *Athens* undertook with many sharp and cutting *Ironies* to reprove the vices of his Age; and with a great deal of Wit and Reason to perswade men to the sober practice of Vertue, the licentious people knew not what to do with him, for they were not able to withstand the force of

his

his arguments; at last *Aristophanes* (having a *Comical Wit* whereby he was able to make any thing seem ridiculous although he knew very well the *Wisdom* and *Learning* of *Socrates*; yet) to please and humour the people, he brings him upon the Stage, and represents his grave instructions after such a manner, as turn'd all into a matter of laughter to the people of *Athens*: which did more mischief to the reputation of *Vertue* among them, than the taking away his life did. For, his dying convinced the people he was in good earnest, and brought a great veneration to his memory; whereas the other exposed him only to scorn and contempt; and the people were made judges whether it were with cause or no: who besides their ignorance and want of judgement, were too much parties to be Judges. This is the method which men take, when they set their *wits* against *vertue* and *Goodness*; they know it is impossible to argue men out of it; but it is very easie by ridiculous postures, and mimical gestures, and profane similitudes, to put so grave and modest a thing as *vertue* is out of Countenance, among those who are sure to laugh on the other side. I do not think such things can signifie any thing to Wise men; but when was the world made up of such? and therefore it signifies very much to the mischief of those, who have not the *courage* to love *despised vertue*;

nor

nor to defend a Cauſe that is *laughed down.* And to theſe I may now add,

3. The *bad examples* of others, eſpecially of thoſe to whom it belonged to *teach and encourage vertue,* above others. No man will pretend, that it is ground enough for him to do a thing meerly becauſe he ſees another do it; yet in all Ages men have ſeen and complained that the power of examples hath outdone that of Laws. Some that think themſelves more ſubtle than others, queſtion whether thoſe mean what they ſay, who ſpeak one thing and do another; and therefore they will do what they think the others mean; which were a good plea if their actions were better than their words. Others think, that all diſcourſes of vertue, and honeſty, and true Honour, are meer matter of talk for men to entertain ſome idle hours with, and that men are univerſally agreed in nothing but in ſpeaking well and doing ill. Theſe look on vertue as a kind of *Phœnix*, a thing often talked of, and believed by ſome, but never ſeen by any: but ſuch find all things ſo very bad at home, that out of charity to themſelves, they believe the whole World to be like them. Others have ſo much natural modeſty and ſenſe of ſhame that they have not the courage to commit a great wickedneſs, unleſs they were hardned to it by the example of greater ſinners before them. But the moſt common

mon reaſon of the prevalency of example is, that men find in themſelves a ſtrong propenſity and inclination to do evil, and are willing to meet with ſuch a pretence for committing it, that they do but as others do; and therefore I cannot think that bare example were enough to corrupt the World if there were not ſome antecedent inclination in humane nature to the practice of evil. For ſince there is leſs reaſon to follow bad examples than good, why ſhould one prevail more than the other in the World, if there were nothing but the bare example to move? But that inclination being conſidered, we may eaſily give an account of the ill conſequence which the bad examples of thoſe who are to direct and encourage others in vertue, muſt needs be of to the reſt of mankind. *Xenophon* was not without reaſon ſo much diſpleaſed, when he ſaw ſome of the beſt of *Socrates* his Diſciples, make their *Court* to *Dionyſius* in *Sicilie*; knowing how inconſiſtent the reputation of vertue is, with the very *ſuſpicion* of *Flattery*: and that nothing makes great men more ſuſpicious of *vertue*, than when they ſee *Philoſophers* become *Flatterers*, and carrying on the reſtleſs deſigns of ambition under the pretence of teaching the art of contentment to others. It was this which made the very name of them become ſo odious at *Rome*, that even vertue it ſelf was hated for their ſakes:

Xen. ep. ad Æſch.

ſo

so that the very teachers of vertue contributed to the increase of vice. Especially, when by their endless disputes & wranglings about words & terms of art, they made the people suspect they did but play prizes before them; and only pretended to quarrel, but were well enough agreed to cheat and deceive them. Upon such grounds as these, all the *Motives* to *vertue* contained in the *Writings* and *instructions* of *Philosophers* lost their due force and efficacy on the minds of the people, who were rather more *hardned in their sins* by these disadvantages which attended the means that were used to reclaim them from the practice of them.

But when all other *motives* proved ineffectual by these disadvantages, what could be more reasonably expected, than that the *motives* of the *Gospel* should prevail with men, being of so great weight in themselves, and recommended with so much advantage to the World, by the examples of those who delivered them? The great arguments of Christianity against the practice of sin are not drawn from any uncertain *Topicks*, or nice and curious speculations; but from the influence mens good or evil actions in this World will have upon their happiness or misery in another. And what concerns another state is revealed with much more clearness, and confirmed by stronger evidence, and enforced by more mo-

ving considerations, than ever it was before among the best and wisest of the Gentiles. The doctrine of Christianity is plain and peremptory in this matter, *that God will render to every man according to his Works*: and *that the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.* And however prone men *are to be deceived with vain words*, yet let them look to themselves, *God will not be mocked*, (however men may be) *for because of these things the wrath of God will come upon the Children of disobedience.* No Sacrifices, no prayers, no penances, no vows and promises will keep off this wrath of God without a hearty repentance and timely reformation. Never any Religion or institution in the World made it so much its business to keep men from doing evil, and to perswade them to do good, as the Christian doth. The Apostles thought it the greatest contradiction to their profession, for any men to be called Christians, and to live in the practice of their former sins, *Let the time past of your life suffice you*, saith S. Peter, *to have wrought the will of the Gentiles*, i.e. that time past when you were no Christians. To be a Christian then was all one as of a loose, profane, dissolute person to become sober, religious, exact in his conversation. *To put on Christ*, was but another phrase, *for making no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*; *To learn Christ*, was all one as *to put off as concerning the former*

Rom. 2. 6. 1. 18.

Gal. 6. 7.

Eph. 5. 6.

1 Pet. 4. 3.

Rom. 13. 14.

mer conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Eph. 4. 20, 21, 24. Those were the blessed dayes of Christianity, when it was no hard matter to understand what it was to be a Christian; when the niceties of disputes, and the subtle artifices of men of corrupt minds had not yet debauched the notion of Christianity, to reconcile it with the lusts of men. To be a Christian then, was not to be versed in the subtilties of the Schools; or to be able to swallow contradictions without chewing them; or to be as fierce and earnest for every doubtful opinion and uncertain custome, as if the substance of Christianity were like *Epicurus* his World made up of a great number of very small and restless Atomes. To be a Christian, was not to fight for the Faith, but to live by it; not to quarrel for good Works, but to practise them; In short, to be a Christian was *to depart from iniquity and to do good*, to be meek, and humble, and patient, and peaceable towards all men; to be charitable, and kind; to be sober and *temperate in all things*, to be holy, sincere, and innocent in his actions towards God and men. This is the true *Idea* of a Christian, and not a meer *Idea*; but such as every one that owns himself to be a Christian is bound by the most Sacred vow of *Christianity* in *Baptism* to be like; so that if either the consi-

deration of their own eternal welfare, or the nature, design, or honour of Christianity, or their own most solemn engagements can restrain men from the practice of sin, we see that those who are Christians, are under the most powerful *motives* and *engagements* against it.

But yet such there have been (I wish I could not say such there are) who have broken through all these things, and *have been hardned through the deceitfulness of sin.* One might have thought, if any persons had been out of this danger, they had been such as the *Apostle* makes this exhortation to; who had seen the *miraculous operations of the Holy Ghost for* confirming the *doctrine* and *Motives* of *Christianity*; nay who had themselves been
Heb.6.4,5. *made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and had tasted of this Heavenly gift, and of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come*: Who had testified their repentance for their former sins in the most publick and solemn manner, and had entred into the most Sacred Vow of Baptism, never to return more to the practice of it: who had done this in the heat of persecution, which they endured with courage and rejoycing; yet after all these things, the Apostle expresses a more than ordinary jealousie lest any of them *should fall away*, and *their hearts be hardned through the deceitfulness of sin.* When *Critias* and *Alcibiades* had forsaken the paths of vertue, which they seemed very forward in,

in, while they continued under the instructions of Socrates, Xenophon saith, *there were some that contended that they never had any vertue at all, because those who once had it could never lose it: but for his part, he saith, he was by no means satisfied with their opinion: for as men by discontinuing bodily exercises make themselves uncapable of doing those things which they were most expert in before; so men by the neglect of improving their minds in vertue, and giving way to the temptations of honour and pleasure* (which was the case of *Critias* and *Alcibiades*) *may by degrees lose the force of all the Motives to vertue and consequently the vertue it self.* It is agreed by all men who understand any thing in these matters, that even *Grace*, although it be the effect of a divine power on the minds of men, is of it self capable of being lost; the great dispute is, whether it may be lost past all recovery? But as *we* have no more reason to set any bounds to the Grace of God in mens Recovery, than as to their first Repentance; so we ought to consider, that there is such *a falling away* mentioned by the *Apostle*, of *those who have been once enlightned, of which*, he saith, *it is impossible to renew them again to repentance*: and that Scripture deals with all persons in its exhortations, and admonitions, and threatnings, as if they were capable of falling to the utmost degree: and to suppose that thing impossible to be done, which the graveſt counsels, and the most

Ἀπομνημ. βιβλ. α'. p. 416.

Heb. 6. 4, 6.

most vehement perſwaſions are uſed to keep men from the doing of, is to make a ſeyere reflection on the wiſdom of them that give them. And the *Apoſtle* here leaves none of them out; but bids the moſt *forward believers* beware of an *evil heart of unbelief*; and thoſe who had been moſt ſoftned by repentance, take heed of *being hardned through the deceitfulneſs of ſin*. So that we ſee, how powerful ſoever the *motives* to *Vertue* are; how great ſoever the *engagements* againſt *Sin*; yet the *Apoſtle* thought it needful to give them warning againſt the *deceitfulneſs of ſin*.

2. But what kind of *deceitfulneſs* is this in ſin, that the beſt and wiſeſt men are ſo much caution'd againſt it? What irreſiſtible *charms* doth it uſe to draw men into its ſnares? with what infuſion doth it ſo far intoxicate mankind to make them dote upon it, againſt the convictions of Reaſon, and dictates of Conſcience, and the power of perſwaſion, and the moſt ſolemn and repeated Vows and Promiſes againſt it? nay to make men purſue it, to ſuch a degree as rather to be damned for it than forſake it? If we were to conſider this only by Reaſon, we could imagine nothing leſs than that *ſin* at one time or other hath laid ſuch a mighty obligation on mankind, that rather than part with it, the greater part of men, out of meer gratitude, would be content to ſuffer for ever with it: or, that it is a thing ſo

abſolutely

absolutely necessary to the comfort of mens lives, that they cannot live one good day without it: Whereas in truth, the whole race of mankind hath suffered extreamly and continually by it; and it is so far from being necessary to the comfort of mens lives, that the greatest troubles and vexations of life have risen from it; and men may enjoy far greater satisfaction, and more real contentment; and more noble, and solid, and lasting pleasures if they did utterly renounce and forsake it. But this still makes the difficulty so much the greater, how it should so far bewitch and infatuate the far greatest part of mankind; and of those who know how dearly they must suffer for it in another World? And yet to assoil this difficulty, we have only two Accounts to give how sin comes to deceive mankind so generally, so fatally; and those are 1. By subtle insinuations, 2. By false reasonings.

1. *By subtle insinuations.* The great Masters of pleading in ancient times have told us, that there are some Causes which are never to be managed by plain and downright reasonings, (because they are too weak to bear that method of handling) and then they bid men have a care in their beginning, of coming close to the business, but they must fetch a compass about, and by secret arts and degrees insinuate them-

themſelves into the good opinion of the Judges before they are aware of it. This is the very method which is made uſe of *by the deceitfulneſs of Sin*; it dares not ſtand the examination of any cloſe reaſoning, for all its artifices would preſently be diſcover'd then; but it makes uſe of theſe arts of inſinuation. 1. It endeavours to raiſe a good opinion of it ſelf by falſe colours and repreſentations of things. 2. When it hath done that, it draws men on by degrees to the practice of it. 3. When men are engaged in the practice of ſin, then it repreſents to them how much it is their own intereſt to defend it, and ſo brings them from *the counſel of the ungodly, and the way of ſinners, to the ſeat of the ſcornful.*

1. It endeavours to raiſe a good opinion of it ſelf by *falſe colours* and repreſentations of things. The firſt precept of inſinuation is to remove prejudice; for while that continues, all that can be ſaid will be of no force. While men look on ſin as vile, and loathſome; as mean and unworthy of a man; as inconſiſtent with the peace and contentment of their minds, ſo long temptations are eaſily reſiſted: all arts muſt therefore be uſed to make it appear with all the addreſs and flattery which is moſt apt to entice a poor deluded ſinner. Then, the fetters and ſhackles which it brings to enſlave men with, muſt be looked on and admired as ornaments;

it's

its most sordid and filthy pleasures must be thought great and manly; and a little present honour and advantage appear more valuable than an eternal state of Happiness and Glory. These are things we should think it very hard for men to be deceived with; and yet every day we find they are so; and which is far more, they are ready to take it very ill of those who go about to undeceive them. In other cases, if a man tells another, that he is like to be deceived with a false and counterfeit Jewel instead of a true one; or to buy a bad Title to an Estate instead of a good one; he thinks himself very much obliged to him for his fidelity and kindness; only in the case of mans beloved sins, although they will prove the greatest cheats in the World to him, yet he cannot well endure to be told so; but his blood is apt to fire and enflame him into a passion against him that doth it; and although it be meant with the greatest innocency and kindness, it is ready to be interpreted to be only the effect of malice and ill will. For now sin hath insinuated it self so far into him, that no one can be thought a friend to the person, who is not so to his sins; and they are then come to that height of friendship and community of interests, to have common friends and common enemies. Now all the discourses of the freedom, and

pleasure, and satisfaction of a mans mind in the practice of vertue appear very dull and insipid things; and fit only for *Learned Fools* or *Philosophers* to talk of.

Nothing deserves the name of *Liberty* with them, but a power of doing what they please. What nonsense and contradiction doth it seem to them for those to be accounted free, who are under any bonds or restraints? No matter to them, whether they be from God, or Nature, from Reason or Conscience, as long as they are restraints, they look on them as inconsistent with their notion of liberty. And next to those who threaten men with punishments in another World for what they do amiss in this, they account those the greatest Fools that first found out the distinction of good and evil, and just and unjust in the actions of men. "What Fools (say they) were they to "fasten dishonourable and reproachful names on "some of the most pleasant and beneficial actions of life? For thus a man is debarred that "noble and manly Vice of Drunkenness for fear "of losing the reputation of Sobriety; and the "extravagancies of Lust, for fear of doing injury to his neighbours Bed; and supposing a "man hath never so much advantages in his "hands to enrich himself by defrauding another, yet he must not do it, because although

"an

"an eſtate be in the keeping of a Fool, yet "another muſt not be a Knave to get it from him. Thus do theſe miſerable Slaves to Vice pitty the weakneſs of thoſe who have ſo little wit (as they think) not to underſtand the Liberty they enjoy: But thus do mad men pitty the dulneſs of thoſe that are in their wits, that do not ſing, and rant, and deſpiſe the World, as they do: and fancy themſelves to be Kings and Princes, while they are tyed faſt in their chains, and lye in Straw. And upon ſuch grounds as theſe, the moſt rude and barbarous *Indians* did better underſtand the liberty of mankind, than the moſt civilized Nations. For all civility is a debarring men of ſome part of this natural liberty, *i. e.* of thoſe things which men have a power to do; and upon this ground all antient Law-givers and Wiſe men, who by degrees brought ſeveral Nations to Order and Government, and to live by Laws, ought to be hated as the greateſt Tyrants and Uſurpers upon the liberties of mankind: and the natural conſequence of this would be the overthrow of all Laws, and Order, and Government in the World. But if there muſt be ſome reſtraints upon men, then we are to conſider what reſtraints are juſt and reaſonable, within whoſe bounds we are to contain our ſelves; and whatever tends to the diſhonour of God, to the injury of others, or to

our own destruction, it is all the reason in the World we should abstain from. And if men would but do this, they would be kept from the practice of sin: And so this imaginary notion of a boundless *liberty* will appear to be only one of the *false colours* that sin puts upon evil actions, on purpose to tempt men to the commission of them.

But there is another Poison which more subtilly and dangerously insinuates it self into the hearts of men, and by which sin gets the possession there, and that is the *love of pleasure*; I do not mean the pleasure of the mind, or the pleasure of a good conscience, for there is no danger in these; but it is the love of sensual pleasure which is most apt to ensnare men in the practice of sin. It is under this representation chiefly, that sin deceives, betrayes, entangles, bewitches, destroyes the souls of men: It is this which fills the imagination, and darkens the understanding with filthy steams and vapours, and hurries a man on with the impetuous violence of passions, without considering the mischievous consequence which attends it, either as to his honour in this World, or his salvation in another. This danger which attends the pleasures of sin was well represented in one of the *Eastern Parables, of a man violently pursued by Wild Beasts to the top of a Precipice, where there was a Tree growing*

Perzoes *Proleg.* 3. c. 10. *ad Specim. sapient. vet. Indorum.*

growing on the side of a great lake; and at the foot of it a prodigious Serpent lying ready to devour him; the man being in this astonishment gets upon the first branch of the tree he could reach; but he was no sooner there, but his horrour increased at the apprehension of his danger on every side of him; and that which added the most to his consternation was that the very branch on which he stood was almost eaten off; while he was in this terrible fright, he looks up to the top of the tree, and there sees some wild honey trickling down the body of the tree, which he was so taken with, and so pleased with the sweetness of it, that he forgets his danger, till of a sudden the branch breaks, and down he drops into the lake without recovery. This is the true representation of the pleasures of sin, which men are so much entertained with, that they never consider the hazard they run, and scarce think of their danger till they drop into that state of misery from whence there is no redemption.

But besides these soft and voluptuous sinners, (who are easily deceived and hardly drawn out of the snares they fall into) there are others of a more busie, restless, and designing temper, and to these sin appears under another shape to deceive them, with all the advantages of external Splendour and Greatness. And thus they who possibly might escape the baits of pleasure, are carryed away by the more plausible temptations of Riches and Honour. It is supposed by

some,

ſome, that when the Devil tempted Chriſt
Mat. 4.8,9. with the offers of *the Kingdoms of this world, if he would fall down and worſhip him*, he did not know, who he was, but had a mind to try him by the moſt probable way of diſcovering what was within him: But ſurely the Devil thought him ſome extraordinary perſon, or elſe he would never have made ſo large an offer at firſt, *viz.* of no leſs *than all the Kingdoms of the World*, whereas very much leſs than one of theſe hath ſerved to corrupt and debauch the minds of many who have been great pretenders to Piety and Vertue. It was indeed ſomewhat a hard condition the Devil joyned with his offer, *to fall down and Worſhip him*, becauſe he then deſigned not only a Victory but a Triumph; but with others he conceals the condition and draws them on by degrees, ſtill riſing higher and higher in his temptations, thereby feeding and enlarging their deſires; till the love of this World hath gotten ſuch an entire poſſeſſion of their hearts, that they ſcarce ever in good earneſt think of another till their ſouls are paſſing into it. And then it may be, they ſadly reflect on their own folly, in that they have preferred the deluding ſcenes and pompous ſhews of worldly greatneſs, before the compleat and endleſs felicity of another life. But it very often happens, that it is not ſo long, as till their leaving this World, that men come

to

to understand the restless folly of ambition. For the things of this World are like *Epicurus* his *Atoms*, alwayes moving and justling one against another; and one mans ambition serves to supplant anothers, and they who cannot raise themselves may yet help to ruine others; and oft-times those very designs by which they most hoped to advance themselves, prove the occasion of their fall and destruction. The *Mahumetans* have a story to this purpose; *In the time of Jesus three men in a journey hapned to find a Treasure; but being hungry, they sent one of their number to buy provisions; he consults how he might get this treasure to himself, and for that end resolves to poison their meat, the other two agreed to share it between them, and to kill the third assoon as he returned; which they did, and themselves soon after dyed of the poisoned meat. Jesus passing by with his disciples, said, This is the condition of this world! see what the love of it hath brought these men to! Wo be to him that looks for any other usage from it.* This is the first way whereby sin doth insinuate into the minds of them; *viz.* by false colours and representations of things. *Warn. Prov. Persic. p. 33.*

2. But when sin hath so far insinuated it self to bring men to a better opinion of it, it doth not presently hurry them on to the greatest height of wickedness; but leads them gently and by easie steps and degrees, lest they should start back presently with the fright of some dreadful

sin.

ſin. Which will appear if we conſider, how one comes to be corrupted by ſin that hath had the advantage of a modeſt and vertuous education: if thoſe who deſign to debauch him ſpeak out at firſt in plain words what they aim at, a ſudden horrour ſeizes upon him at the apprehenſion of it, and it may be he hates their company for ever after. But there is ſo much a ſenſe of ſhame left in humane nature, that men dare not tempt others to ſin, at leaſt at firſt, in plain terms; and the ſame temptation which being repreſented one way would affright, appearing with greater art and diſſimulation may eaſily prevail. And ſin is a thing, that men hate to be forced, but too much love to be cheated into the practice of it. How doth a young ſinner ſtruggle with himſelf, and would if it were poſſible get out of the noiſe of his own Conſcience, when he hath offered force and violence to it! He is very uneaſie to himſelf, and wiſheth a thouſand times he had never committed the ſin, rather than to feel ſuch horrour and diſquiet in his mind, upon the ſenſe of it. But if this doth not make him preſently repent, and reſolve never to be guilty again of the ſame folly, (as in all reaſon it ought to do) then by time and company he wears off the impreſſion of his guilt, and the next occaſion of ſinning makes him forget the wounds of his Conſcience, and the ſmart

he

he endured before; and the fresh temptation revives the sense of his former pleasure, and then he is able to withstand no longer; and thus by repeating the same acts, by degrees he becomes a very hopeful sinner, and the reports of his Conscience are but like that of sounds at a greater distance; they lessen still more and more, till at last they cannot be heard at all. And when he hath thus mastered his Conscience, as to any one sin, which at first he was fearful of committing, and hath found such an *Ice* upon his Conscience as will bear him, he goes on still farther and farther, till nothing be too hard for him. He that at first started and trembled at the hearing of an horrid oath, now can hear whole volleys of them discharged without shrinking; and can bear his part in that hellish *Concert*: and he that was so hardly brought to be wicked himself, may in a little time (as some men are strange proficients in wickedness) tempt and encourage others to the practice of it.

3. And when men are arrived to an habitual continuance in sin, then for their present ease and security, they cast about for any wayes to defend it. For whatever is become of Conscience, they may have such a sense of reputation left, that they would not be thought *Fools*, and be contemned and despised by others. But although

it be impoſſible for ſuch to avoid ſcorn and contempt among all thoſe who have any true regard to Vertue or Honour, yet they will endeavour rather to defend themſelves in doing ill, than recover their reputation by repentance. And becauſe it would puzzle the wits of the moſt ſubtle and concerned perſons to find out pretences and excuſes for ſome kinds of ſins; therefore the eaſieſt way is to repreſent all the World as alike bad, although not alike cunning; and although it may be not in the ſame way, yet in ſomething as ill in it ſelf, but more agreeable to their Age, temper, and condition of life. Thus the greateſt ſinners love to herd themſelves in a croud, and think it ſome poor defence for their ſins, that they would have others believed to be as bad as they: as though a man were in the leſs danger by the plague, becauſe it is a general contagion. But if it happen that ſome perſons in the World ſhould have any reputation for Vertue among them, then all the weakneſſes, and indiſcretions of ſuch, are ſure to be enquired after, that ſo what is accounted vertue, may be thought only natural ſourneſs of temper, or want of wit to be otherwiſe. But if any ſuch ſhould be found in a miſcarriage, what Joy and Triumph doth this make? what load of circumſtances and aggravations do they lay upon them; as though one ſingle miſcarriage of ſuch perſons were

were to weigh down a thousand enormities of theirs. And because it is impossible to defend their extravagant courses by *Reason*, the only way left for them is to make *Satyrical Invectives* against *Reason*; as though it were the most uncertain, foolish and (I had almost said) *unreasonable* thing in the World: and yet they pretend to shew it in arguing against it: but it is pitty such had not their wish, *to have been Beasts rather than men*, (if any men can make such a *wish* that have it not already) that they might have been less capable of doing mischief among mankind; by representing all the excellencies of humane nature, which are *Reason*, and *Vertue*, and *Religion*, but as more grave and solemn fopperies. But how hard are such men put to defend their vices, that cannot do it, without trampling under foot the most noble perfections of their own nature!

These however are the more ingenuous sort of sinners, that yield *Reason* and *Religion* to be of *Vertues* side; but there are others that make use of some shallow pretences of *Reason* to excuse themselves in their sins: which is the second way whereby sin deceives men, *viz.*

2. *By false Reasonings*: and those taken either, 1. From their Present impunity: 2. Or from their Future Repentance.

1. From their *present impunity* in sinning, men

are apt to deceive themſelves into a continuance in it. This is the account the Wiſe man hath long ſince given of mens being hardned in ſin; Eccl. 8. 11. *Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily; therefore the hearts of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.* It ſeems ſomewhat hard to underſtand the conſequence, why men ſhould grow more deſperately wicked, becauſe God gives them a ſpace to repent? Is it neceſſary that if God doth puniſh at all, he muſt do it preſently? that would ſeem to be rage and fury, or a neceſſity of nature, and not juſtice. Cannot judgement be duly executed, unleſs the Judge break open the Priſon doors, and torment the Malefactor in his chains? Why may not God reſpite the puniſhment of ſinners, when he pleaſes, to another ſtate, ſince he hath declared Act. 17. 31. *that he hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the World in righteouſneſs?* What incongruity is there in this to any principle of reaſon or juſtice? Will not this time of Gods patience, be a ſufficient vindication of his lenity and goodneſs in order to the drawing men to repentance? And will not the day of his future judgement be a full vindication of his juſtice? Will not the inſupportable horrours of a miſerable eternity diſcover far more Gods abhorrence of ſin, than preſent ſufferings in this life, which, the greater they are, the leſs they continue? But all this

falſe

falſe way of reaſoning ariſeth from that groſs piece of ſelf-flattery that ſuch do imagine God to be like themſelves; *i. e.* as cruel and revengeful as they are: and they preſently think, if any perſons did offend them at the rate that ſinners are ſaid to offend God, and they had ſo much power in their hands to puniſh them as he has, without any fear of revenge upon themſelves, they would be ſure to diſpatch them preſently; but becauſe they ſee God doth it not, therefore they conclude that all the talk of Gods anger and hatred againſt ſin is without ground: and from hence they take encouragement to ſin. So the Pſalmiſt ſaith in Gods name, *Theſe things thou didſt and I kept ſilence*; and they preſently took his *ſilence* for *conſent*; for it follows, and *thou thoughteſt that I was altogether ſuch a one as thy ſelf*: but the Pſalmiſt adds, how ill he took this at mens hands, and that he would one day make them know the difference between the forbearance of ſinners, and the love of their ſins; *but I will reprove thee, and ſet them in order before thee*. And therefore he bids them be better adviſed, and *conſider this while they forget God, leſt he tear them in pieces, and there be none to deliver*. Pſal. 50. 21. v. 22.

2. Men are hardned by the deceitfulneſs of ſin, from the hopes of their *future repentance*. For that is one of the great cheats of ſin, that every one thinks he can repent and ſhake off his

his ſins when he hath a mind to do it. Sin doth not lye like a heavy weight upon their backs, ſo that they feel the load of it; and therefore they think it is eaſily removed, if they would ſet themſelves to it. Moſt of thoſe that believe a God and a judgement to come, and yet continue in ſin, do it upon this preſumption, that one time or other, they ſhall leave their ſins, and change the courſe of their lives before they go out of this world. They have not only thoughts of repentance, but general purpoſes of doing the acts of it at one time, or other; but that time is not come, and God knows whether it ever will or no. For ſin entices them and draws them on ſtill; and when any motions towards repentance come into their minds, that preſently ſuggeſts, *It is time enough yet; why ſo much haſte? there will be trouble enough in it when you muſt do it, what need you bring it ſo faſt upon you? Are not you likely to hold out a great many years yet? what pitty it is to loſe ſo much of the pleaſure of life, while you are capable of enjoying it? There is old Age coming, and when you will be good for nothing elſe, then will be time enough to grow wiſe and to repent.* But O fooliſh ſinner, who hath bewitched thee to hearken to ſuch unreaſonable ſuggeſtions as theſe are! For

3. In the laſt place, it ought to be our preſent, our conſtant, our greateſt care to prevent being

hardned

hardned by the deceitfulneſs of ſin. For to this end, it is not enough to conſider of it at one time or other in our lives, but we muſt be *exhorting one another daily, while it is called to day, leſt any of us be hardned through the witchcraft and deceitfulneſs of ſin*: And if it be ſo much the duty of others to ſhew that regard to one anothers ſouls; how much more doth it become us to do it, who expect to be called to an account at the great day for the diſcharge of our truſt in this matter? It is a dreadful paſſage we read of in the *Prophet Ezekiel*, and enough to make our ears to tingle at the repeating it, *When I ſay unto the wicked, O wicked man thou ſhalt ſurely dye, if thou doſt not ſpeak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man ſhall dye in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand.* Ezek. 33. 8. We would fain believe this to have been ſome particular and extraordinary commiſſion given to the Prophet by God himſelf, which doth not concern us; for what will become of us, if not only our own faults (which God knows are too many) but other mens ſhall be charged upon us? when either through neglect, or flattery, or fear of diſpleaſing, or for any mean and unworthy ends, we betray our truſt, and inſtead of preventing prove the occaſion of mens being too much *hardned through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.* But although we neither pretend to be *Prophets*, nor *Apoſtles*, yet it is

our

our Office to take care of the *Souls* of men, and can we diſcharge that, as we ought to do, if we do not with all faithfulneſs warn men of the danger they run into *through the deceitfulneſs of ſin*? It were happy for us if we could ſay, *that all the Lords people are holy*; for then we ſhould have nothing to do, but to praiſe and commend their Vertues, which were an eaſie and a delightful task: but what pleaſure is it to rake into the ſores, or to reprove the Vices of a degenerate age? to be thought troubleſome and impertinent, if we do our duty; and men of no conſcience, if we do it not? But our work is neither to libel our Auditors, nor to flatter them; neither to repreſent them as better, nor worſe than they are; nor to charge them with more guilt than their own conſciences do charge them with: but our buſineſs is, to beſeech and exhort them by the mercies of God, by the ſufferings of Chriſt, by the love and tenderneſs they have for their immortal ſouls, that they *would to day, while it is called to day, take heed leſt they be hardned through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.* And that will appear to be very reaſonable on theſe conſiderations.

1. That none are out of the danger of it, while they live in this tempting World. What need have we to take care of being deceived by that, which hath been too hard for the *beſt*, the *wiſeſt*, and

and the *greateſt* of men? Man in his beſt ſtate, even that of Innocency, was deceived by the inſinuations of ſin: when there was no matter within for the temptation to work upon, no reaſon ſuggeſted that could move a common underſtanding, no intereſt or advantage that could ſway him; no other moving cauſe appears to us of that fatal Apoſtaſie of *Adam*, but either the imagination of ſome unknown pleaſure, or the bare curioſity of trying an experiment what the effects would be of taſting *the forbidden fruit*. And ever ſince ſo general hath the corruption of mankind been, ſo ſucceſsful have the artifices and deceits of ſin been in the World, that the beſt of men have not wholly eſcaped them; but have ſometimes fallen in thoſe very Graces which have been moſt remarkable in them, as *Abraham* in his truſt in God, *Moſes* in his meekneſs, *Job* in his patience, *Peter* in his zeal for Chriſt. What cauſe then have others to look to themſelvs!

If wiſdom and experience would have ſecured men, we ſhould have thought, of all men in the World, *Solomon* the leaſt in danger of being deceived by the inſinuations of ſin, who had given ſuch excellent cautions againſt thoſe very ſnares he fell into himſelf; and that to ſuch a degree, that his caſe is left diſputable to this day, whether he ever recovered by repentance or no. What numbers are there upon

record of those mighty men, who have made the earth to tremble at the noise of their Armies; who have led Kings in chains after their Triumphal Chariots, and have been served by those whom others have adored; yet have, notwithstanding all this, been enslaved themselves by some mean lust, and destroyed by the power of an effeminate passion? What can be strong enough to resist those charms, which neither innocency, nor wisdom, nor power are sufficient security against? Nothing, but the *Grace of God*, and continual care of our selves.

2. The less men suspect their danger, the more cause they have to be afraid of it. None are more fatally deceived by sin, than those who apprehend no danger in it, or think they can escape it when they please. How strangely infatuated are those through *the deceitfulness of sin*, who think with themselves, that after they have spent their lives in sin, they shall make God amends by a few dying groans, and such a repentance as can have *no amendment of life*? Most men, who are the greatest slaves to their sins, are so much deceived by them, as to think they have them wholly at their command, and can when they please cast them off: and such imaginations keep them faster in subjection to them. For if they did apprehend themselves under such slavery, as really they are, they would

would grow weary and impatient of the yoak; whereas now becauſe they are not forced to commit their ſins, they ſuppoſe they can with eaſe forſake them. But none are ſuch incurable Fools, as they that think themſelves Wiſe; and none are ſo miſerably deceived as they that think themſelves too cunning for their ſins. If it be ſo eaſie to ſhake off your ſins, remember that your condemnation will be ſo much more juſt, if you do it not; for God required no hard thing for you to do: and if it be ſo eaſie, why is it not hitherto done? Why do you mock God ſo often, and pretend every year to repent, and yet are every year as bad, if not worſe than other? Why are not *the fruits of repentance* ſeen in the amendment of life for one year, or a moneth, or one bare week? Is it not worth while to do ſo little for him, that hath done ſo much for you? Methinks, common ingenuity might prevail with men, at leaſt to let God have ſome part of their lives entire to himſelf, without interfering with the Devil. But therein lyes a great part of the *deceitfulneſs of ſin*, that it falls out here, as in ſome malignant Diſeaſes, men ſeldom underſtand their danger, till they are almoſt paſt recovery.

3. None are ſo likely to be hardned in ſin, as thoſe who delay and put off their repentance. For the very putting it off is a ſign that ſin

hath a greater power, than the convictions of Conſcience: for why ſhould men ever intend to repent, if they did not think it neceſſary? and if they think it neceſſary and yet do it not, it is plain there is ſomething within them ſtronger than Conſcience, which keeps them from it. So that he that intends to repent, and yet lives in ſin, hath that aggravation of ſin above others, that he ſins againſt his Conſcience all that time. Tell me then, O thou ſubtle ſinner, that hopeſt to be too hard for God and for ſin too, by enjoying thy ſins as long as thou canſt, and then repenting at laſt, to eſcape the vengeance of God: doſt thou in good earneſt intend ever to repent or no? If thou doſt not, never deceive thy ſelf; God will not accept theſe pretences and promiſes inſtead of real repentance. If thou doſt intend it ſincerely, what makes thee to intend it? is it not, that thou art convinced it is much better to be done than not, but canſt not find it in thy heart to do it yet? Thou knoweſt all this while it were much better to leave thy ſins, than to live in them, it were far better to be ſober, and temperate, and pious, and devout, than to be debauched and profane; and yet for all this, thou doſt not repent, but goeſt on in the ſame courſe. Conſider then, that this very circumſtance deeply aggravates every ſin that is committed after it. For it is not a bare neglect

of

of repentance, which thou art guilty of, but a contempt of God and Goodneſs; it is, not only not repenting, but it is an obſtinate and wilful reſolution of ſinning: for there is no *medium* between living in ſin and forſaking of it; and nothing deſerves the name of Repentance, that is ſhort of that. And if thou art ſo wilful and unreaſonable now, as notwithſtanding thy reſolutions to repent, to live ſtill in thy ſins, how canſt thou ever hope to repent at laſt, when thy heart will be ſo much more hardned by continuance in ſin?

4. Laſtly, Conſider the ſad condition of thoſe who are hardned through the deceitfulneſs of ſin. They are ſaid in Scripture to be *paſt feeling*, and *to be given over to a reprobate mind, i. e.* to have loſt all ſenſe of their danger, and of the ill condition they are in; they deſpiſe all means of inſtruction, and ſcorn all thoſe who would do them good, and who mean them no other injury but to perſwade them to be happy. With what diſdain and contempt do thoſe proud and lofty ſinners, who are once arrived at this height of wickedneſs, look down upon all thoſe, who endeavour by *Reaſon* and *Scripture* to convince them of their ſins! As though it were not poſſible for any thing to make men ſeem more ridiculous to them, than to ſee them concerned to plead the cauſe of Vertue and Religion. "To what pur-

Eph. 4. 19. Rom. 1. 28.

"poſe

"pose is all this ado about Repentance? why "should not men be let alone to do as they "think fit? for let them preach their hearts out, "men will do as they please. This is the language of those who are already hardned in their sins; but God forbid, it should be so of any here present; who make it our prayer to God *to be delivered from hardneſs of heart, and contempt of his word and commandments.* And we have great reason so to do; for there is no judgement short of hell, like to the being given up to a *reprobate ſenſe*: for all the most weighty arguments and most forcible perswasions are to such but like showres falling upon a Rock, that make some noise and slide off again, but make no impression or entrance into them. *God Almighty* give us all his *Grace* to understand our danger and to repent in time, that *none of us be hardned through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.*

FINIS.